

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



J. BRENDAN SHARKEY
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Thank you Chairwoman Johnson, Chairwoman Gerratana, Ranking Members and members of the Public Health Committee for raising H.B. 5557 AN ACT CONCERNING NEGLECTED CEMETERIES.

There is a growing problem with abandoned and neglected cemeteries in the state of Connecticut. In my own Town of Hamden, we have had two examples of cemeteries that were abandoned by their original owners, leaving the grounds to become overrun with weeds and brush, and leaving the families of interred loved ones with nowhere to turn. In one case, the Town of Hamden assumed responsibility for the cemetery, only to have the Town and its taxpayers exposed to not only the cost of ongoing maintenance, but the liabilities associated with deteriorated conditions. For this reason, the Town is reticent to assume responsibility for a second cemetery in town that has been identified as abandoned.

We have to come to grips with this problem. Like Hamden, municipalities are reluctant to take over an abandoned or neglected cemetery because of financial and liability concerns. Due to strained budgets, municipalities do not have enough resources to incur these costs. As a result, many neglected and abandoned cemeteries become overgrown and forgotten. Municipalities need a remedy to help offset the costs of maintaining delinquent cemetery owners vacating their responsibilities. This legislation seeks to address such a problem.

This bill creates a Neglected Cemetery Account, which will be administered through the Office of Policy and Management. The account will allow for municipalities to apply for funds to maintain a neglected or abandoned cemetery. The funds deposited into the Neglected Cemetery Account will come from an already existing fee placed on copies of death certificates requested from the Department of Public Health. This fee will now be allocated to the Neglected Cemetery Account.

Family members should not have to search through brush and weeds overtaking their loved ones grave stones. Overgrown grass and fallen trees should not be obstacles to paying respect to the dead. This legislation, H.B. 5557 AN ACT CONCERNING NEGLECTED CEMETERIES, will allow municipalities to step in to maintain an otherwise abandoned and neglected cemetery without incurring the liability associated with assuming ownership.

I remain available to work with you, and I appreciate your willingness to address this important issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Brendan Sharkey'.

J. Brendan Sharkey
Speaker of the House